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INDIA

SUCCESS STORY

Indian Communities Prepare for the Worst

Local government officials and were ready and able to respond to severe flooding because of the technical assistance USAID provided in disaster preparedness

Very heavy rain in the Mahanadi River Basin in September 2008 resulted in severe flooding in the Cuttack District of Orissa state in India. Local government officials and volunteer village disaster committees and task forces, however, were ready and able to respond because of the disaster preparedness technical assistance provided by USAID. A total of 111,299 people were evacuated and taken to safe shelter, reducing the loss of life and injury that could have occurred without a well planned and coordinated response.

Cuttack District is a highly fertile and densely populated area with hundreds of rivers that are part of the Mahanadi River Basin. A large portion of the land mass is low lying and because it is prone to severe flooding, the District, largely due to initiatives under the USAID supported Disaster Risk Management Program, has been building its capacity for disaster response. The initiatives, including equipping emergency operations centers (EOCs), developing disaster management plans, forming disaster management teams and village disaster teams, generating awareness, and developing standard operating procedures, all helped combat the 2008 floods.



Photo USAID

Village flooding in India

When the flooding occurred, the plans and preparedness paid off

When the flooding occurred, the plans and preparedness paid off. The district administration deployed USAID trained senior officers to vulnerable areas to assess and monitor the situation as well as coordinate the relief and rescue operations. The Orissa State Government also deployed officers to assist the district administration. Other disaster team members worked to prevent breaches in river embankments. The district EOC functioned round the clock to monitor the flood situation. Boats were rapidly mobilized. The disaster response forces as well as the village disaster teams played a major role in rescuing marooned people and helping them to move to safer places.

Successfully responding to the flooding not only saved lives, but also empowered local residents, showing them that through their preparedness and hard work they made a difference in their own lives.